On Scene Commanders Course

Weaponizing Information & Communicating for Effect in the War for Public Opinion

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Overview

- Global information environment--a Battle Space
- PA Policy
- Accidents on – and off base
- Crisis Incidents
- Media Interview Tips

Global Info Environment

Cognitive Information Environment

LEGISLATORS

INSURGENT WEB SITES

BLOGS

The New York Times ON THE WEB

FACES FROM THE FRONT
Personal stories from our Military in Iraq

Al Arabiya News Channel

tvnz.co.nz

AGI online

MSNBC

JAPAN TODAY

CTV.ca

NEWS24.com

American Soldier
SOLDIERLIFE.COM

washingtonpost.com

Guardian Unlimited

ALJAZEERA.NET

Global Info Environment

- *"Today's military ops tempo combined with the 24-hour news cycle and exponentially increasing media demands, challenge the Air Force's ability to meet the needs of an intensely competitive communications environment. Yet as we fight the Global War on Terror, communications has never been more important. The mass media has global reach and influence that has grown exponentially over the last decade."*

– Pete Geren, Acting SecAF

Wake up and smell the cordite…

- In the U.S., a free press is protected by the Constitution
- Media "frames" events creating effects in public opinion
- Public Support is critical to our mission; public support is influenced by public opinion
- Non-kinetic war for public opinion is raging in the information battlespace …and the enemy is fully engaged in using the information environment to wage cognitive information warfare
- TRUTH is the most powerful weapon we can employ to mitigate the non-kinetic war raging in the cognitive information battlespace

Some Fundamental Truths…

- Information is an offensive & defensive weapon
- The use of Information has effects – both good and bad
- We must PLAN FOR and use the Information Environment to win the war in the Information Battle-Space
- Strategic Communication is a means of winning that war
  - Public Affairs
  - Public Diplomacy
  - Information Operations
- Strategically communicating employing an Effects

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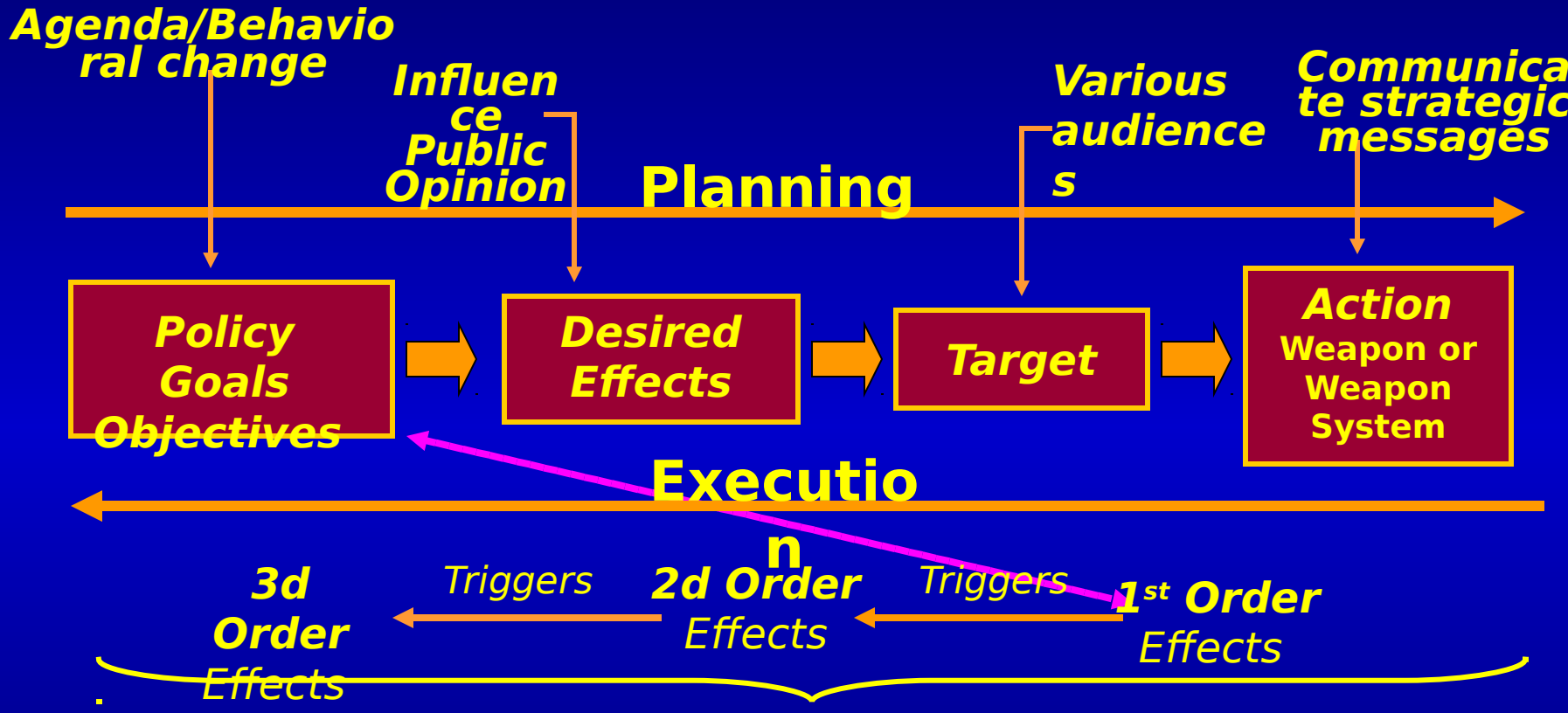
Effects-Based Approach



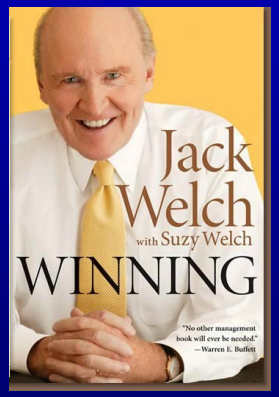
Operational imperative: PA/IO/PD teams, must be fully integrated into combatant commander's EBO planning, execution and assessment cycles to maximize each as a weapon system

Communication Failures

- Abu Ghraib
- AF Tanker contracts
- Gulf War Illness
- Anthrax vaccinations
- Friendly fire incidents
- Fallujah mosque shooting (Marine Corps)
- Guiliana Sgrena incident
- Lt Gilbert's assertions prior to Falluja operation
- Air Force Academy
- Tailhook
- Capt Kelly Flynn
- Insurgent campaigns in Iraq & Afghanistan
- Italian gondola accident
- USS Greenville collision w/the Ehime Maru
- Robert's Ridge
- Aberdeen

In a crisis…

- ✓ "…**Assume the problem is worse than it appears**"
- ✓ **"…Assume there are no secrets in the world and that everyone will eventually find out everything"**
- ✓ **"…assume you and your organization's handling of the crisis will be portrayed in the worst possible light"**
- ✓ **"…assume there will be changes in processes and people. Almost no crisis ends without blood on the floor"**
- ✓ **"…assume your organization will survive, ultimately stronger for what happened"**



- ✓ **"Information you try to shut down will eventually get out, and as it travels, it will certainly morph, twist, and darken"**
- ✓ ***"The only way to prevent that is to expose the problem yourself…Just make sure that what you do say is the total truth…"***

DOD/Air Force PA Policy

Maximum Disclosure, Minimum Delay

- Prevents concerns, counters rumors
- Initial disclosure like fine wine
- ASAP for on-base disturbances

“Bad news is not like fine wine -- it does not improve with age.”

Gen. Creighton Abrams, US Army

News Release Authority

On base incident/accident:

- **Wing or installation CC is release authority**

Off-base:

- **While CC is release authority, it is appropriate for the OSC/CC to speak with the media about events at the scene, noting that the cause will be investigated**

Commanders' responsibilities

On base

- Make allowing press to the scene a priority, to witness actions
- Permit photos ASAP
  - Cover classified/bodies
- Locate press where they have a good view
- Consider shelter, refreshments, transportation needs

Off base

- Realize you have no authority off base (Exception: NDA)
- Compromise of classified?
  - Offer to edit
  - Call Editors
  - Local Law Enforcement
  - FBI
- Make time to meet the press

Nuclear Accidents

- Contact OASD-PA
- Establish JIC with FEMA, DOE

"I can neither confirm nor deny the presence of Nuclear Weapons."

- Exceptions:
  - Public safety
  - Undue public alarm

Damascus, Arkansas

Terrorist Incidents

DOD Policy:

- OSD approval required beyond basic statement:

"DOD has trained forces and equipment to cope with crisis situations."

- No interviews, taping, and/or covering training of crisis response forces

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Ταλκινγ το Τηε Πυβλιχ Τ ηρουγη Τηε Μεδια

(Talking to the public through the media)

On-Scene Commanders Course

Meet the Media

Making a media plan

- Define your objective(s)
- Identify 2-3 key messages
- Anticipate toughest possible questions
- Develop responses for those questions

Message development

- Never just answer the question but respond with a message
- Think in terms of "commercials" or "bumper stickers" to get your point across to the audience
  - ✓ 10 to 15 seconds
- Target your message to get the effect you want
  - ✓ Supports DOD position/theme
- Be prepared, rehearsed

Meet the Media

Interview techniques

"Hook" audience / interviewer

- ✓ Put message up front
- ✓ Force reporter to follow your lead

"It's important that your viewers understand . . ."

"Bridge" to key messages

- Don't wait for right question to be asked

"This is a sad and challenging time; HOWEVER, this year's accident rate is lower than last year at this time."

Meet the Media

Interview techniques

"Flag" what people should remember

- Audience retains 7% of what we say
- The rest comes from voice intonation, non-verbals and foot stamping

- **"Personal authority"**
  - Don't be humble – you're an expert

"During my 18 years of experience..."

Meet the Media

Habits of Effective Interviews

- Stick to the facts, don't speculate
- Tell the truth, don't lie
- Stay in your own lane
- Don't use "No Comment"
- Protect the record—correct inaccuracies
- Don't repeat false or negative questions
- Know what's in the news
- Bad news – get it out fast . . . and move

Summary

- Global information environment is ubiquitous; and it is a battle space used by the “enemy.”
- Public Affairs policies and actions promote maximum disclosure with minimum delay
- Including PA in all planning, to communicate via media is imperative, on and off base, for any crisis is essential to operational success
- Be prepared to meet the media!

Questions